DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 313 761 CS 506 982

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TITLE Superior and Subordinate Perceptions of Management Communication Style and Communication Satisfaction during Performance Appraisal Interviews.
PUB DATE Nov 89
NOTE 32p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (75th, San Francisco, CA, November 18-21, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Research; *Communication Skills; Employer Employee Relationship; Factor Analysis; Interpersonal Communication; *Interviews; Job Performance; Organizational Communication; *Personnel Evaluation; Questionnaires
IDENTIFIERS Communication Behavior; *Communication Satisfaction; Communication Styles; *Managerial Communication; Performance Analysis

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the relationship between management communication style and communication satisfaction during performance appraisal interviews. Generating a 50% response rate, 83 staff employees (47 supervisors and 36 subordinates) at a large midwestern university returned a questionnaire survey assessing communication during performance appraisal interviews. Results suggested that from the superior's perspective, the style of communication perceived to have taken place during an appraisal interview is not correlated with the self-reported satisfaction with communication during the performance appraisal interview. Results also suggested that management communication style is significantly related to a subordinate's satisfaction with communication. Results indicated that subordinates were more affected than superiors by the style of communication that was utilized in important dyadic encounters, such as performance appraisal interviews. (Two tables of data are included and 39 references are attached.) (MG)

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Superior and Subordinate Perceptions of Management Communication Style and Communication Satisfaction During Performance Appraisal Interviews

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Running head: APPRAISAL INTERVIEWS

CS506882

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Applied Communication Section, San Francisco, CA, November 20, 1989

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Superior and Subordinate Perceptions of Management Communication Style and Communication Satisfaction During Performance Appraisal Interviews

This study explores the association between supervisor and subordinate perceptions of management communication style in relation to self-reported levels of communication satisfaction. Subjects responded to this study regarding a recent performance appraisal interview. Results indicate that perceptions of management communication style are not related to a supervisors' level of communication satisfaction while a positive, significant relationship between these two variables for subordinates was found. The conclusion of this paper includes a discussion regarding the apparent perceptual differences of superiors and subordinates participating in this study.

Superior and Subordinate Perceptions of Management Communication Style and Communication Satisfaction During Performance Appraisal Interviews

Introduction

Latham and Wexley (1981) and Gibson, Ivancevich, and Donnelly (1985) recognize that performance appraisal interviews are a common procedure performed within organizations. A typical appraisal interview involves a discussion between an employee and his/her supervisor in regard to an employees' work performance. McGregor (1960) defined appraisal interviews to be: "A session in which the superior communicates his judgments to the subordinate, discusses the reason for them, and advises the subordinate on ways in which he needs to improve" (p. 78). Latham and Wexley (1981) suggest that, "during the performance appraisal interview the supervisor may determine that the person is not fulfilling job responsibilities or behaving in a satisfactory manner due to a lack of knowledge or skill" (p. 5). According to these two definitions the performance appraisal interview typically consists of two individuals interacting on a formal basis for the purpose of discussing the employees' work productivity. However, performance appraisal interviews are not always well received by subordinates nor considered to be a positive communicative experience by supervisors. Thus, an investigation to determine which communicative strategies produce an

employees' and an employers' perception of a positive appraisal interview experience is warranted.

O'Reilly and Anderson (1980) assert that one prevalent, and extremely important, form of communication in organizations is the feedback of information about performance allowing an individual to adjust future behaviors and efforts in order to improve performance. Dipboye and de Pontbriand (1981) recognize that few topics have received as much attention in the industrial and organizational psychology literature as performance appraisals; however, little attention has been paid to the affective perceptions resulting from performance appraisal feedback. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate employees' perceptions of the communication which occurs during the appraisal interview.

The specific purpose of this study is to investigate superior and subordinate perceptions of: (1) management communication style used during the performance appraisal interview and; (2) satisfaction with the communication which occurred during the interview. The following review of literature identifies and describes studies investigating the management communication style and communication satisfaction concepts.

Management Communication Style

Several studies have investigated "styles" of communication utilized within an organizational context.

For example, Richmond and McCroskey (1979) conducted a study investigating the communication style of supervisors. The construct utilized within this study is referred to as management communication style (MCS). This construct was developed and operationalized to identify leadership styles based upon the research of Sadler (1970) and Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958). Specifically, Sadler (1970) identified a four-step continuum of leadership styles (tell, sell, consult, join) which closely resemble the three performance appraisal interview styles (tell & sell, tell & listen, and problem-solving) posited by Maier (1958; 1976). However, based upon Sadler's typology, Richmond and McCroskey operationalize management communication style to be a situational measure which attempts to identify how a supervisor communicates in a specific context or setting.

The "tell" communication style is defined as a manager that announces a decision to a subordinate with the expectation that compliance will be achieved without question. The "sell" communication style is similar to the "telling" style with the exception that the manager attempts to persuade the employee that the decision is desirable. The "consulting" style of communication involves discussion with the subordinate in order to seek his or her advice, information, and suggestions prior to making a decision. The communication style referred to as "join" is defined as the

authority being delegated to the subordinate, in cooperation with the supervisor, to make a decision or resolve an issue.

Results derived from the Richmond and McCroskey (1979) study identify a relationship between management communication style (MCS) and employee satisfaction. In general, employees either perceived their supervisors as utilizing an "employee-centered" management communication style (consults or joins) or a "boss-centered" management communication style (tells or sells). Employees who perceive their supervisors as using a more "employee-centered" MCS are more satisfied than employees who perceive their supervisor as using a more "boss-centered" MCS. Although a variety of employees' perceptions may significantly predict satisfaction, the purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the importance of management communication style as it impacts self-reported levels of employee satisfaction. Further, these results were replicated by Richmond, McCroskey, and Davis (1982).

A subsequent study by Richmond, McCroskey, Davis, and Koontz (1980) investigated the perceptions of power as a mediator of management communication style and employee satisfaction. The five bases of power, as conceptualized by French and Raven (1968), were compared to the four management communication styles in relation to employee satisfaction. Two samples were employed: (1) 250 public school teachers, and (2) 171 managers from three

organizations. Results indicate that both samples associated a "boss-centered", telling or selling MCS, with coercive power which was negatively related to employee satisfaction. The response to referent and expert power yielded a positive relationship with employee satisfaction for both samples. Reward power did not induce either a positive or negative response. Further, legitimate power negatively impacted MCS for the management sample. In conclusion, Richmond, McCroskey, Davis, and Koontz (1980) propose that MCS and power are determining factors of employee satisfaction.

Richmond, Wagner, and McCroskey (1983) investigated the relationship between supervisor and subordinate perceptions of the supervisor's leadership style and satisfaction with supervision. Leadership style was measured with the MCS instrument (Richmond & McCroskey, 1979) and satisfaction with supervision was measured with the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) developed by Smith, Kendall, and Hulin (1969). Supervisor and subordinate perceptions of leadership style modestly correlated with satisfaction with supervision (.25 and .33, respectively). Therefore, these results reaffirm the results of previous studies finding a positive relationship between leadership styles and employee satisfaction.

In conclusion, the construct of management communication style (MCS) has been investigated in relation to employee job satisfaction (Richmond & McCroskey, 1979;

Richmond, McCroskey & Davis, 1982; and Richmond, McCroskey, Davis & Koontz, 1980) and satisfaction with supervision (Richmond, Wagner, & McCroskey, 1982). Further, previous studies by Daly, McCroskey, and Falcione (1976) and Falcione, McCroskey, and Daly (1977) have verified the importance of a positive communicative relationship between a superior and subordinate. However, the relationship between management communication style (MCS) and satisfaction with communication has yet to be investigated. Therefore, the objective of this project is to explore the relationship between these two constructs. More specifically, separate investigations of this relationship were conducted for both superiors and subordinates.

Employee Satisfaction and Communication Satisfaction

Several studies have investigated various perspectives of employee satisfaction, in general, as well as satisfaction with the appraisal interview (Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Burke, Weitzel, & Weir, 1978; Dipboye & de Pontbriand, 1981; Greller, 1978; Meyer & Walker, 1961; Nemeroff & Cosentino, 1979; and Wexley, Singh, & Yukl, 1973). Pearce and Porter (1986) investigated satisfaction with the appraisal system itself. Bassett and Meyer (1968) determined that self-reviews of performance increase an employees' satisfaction with the appraisal interview. Fletcher and Williams (1976) found that subordinates were more favorable toward appraisals if strengths or weaknesses of job

performance were discussed during the interview. Hillery and Wexley (1974) discovered that interviewees' experiencing nonparticipative interviews were more satisfied with the performance appraisal; however, subjects used for the purposes of this study were new to their jobs within the last 12 months thus, preferred to be told how to improve job performance.

In a related study, Maier and Danielsen (1956) investigated employee satisfaction regarding performance appraisal interviews. Five hundred individuals participated in a role play exercise based upon a case study scenario which investigated the effects of two types of disciplinary strategies, judicial and human relations, in relation to satisfaction with the decision achieved following an interaction. Results indicated that 52% of the foremen utilized the human relations approach, 35% used the judicial approach, and 13% failed to reach a decision. Satisfaction with the decision was greatest for the human relations decision-making approach which attempts to solve problems in the best interest of all concerned parties.

Kay, Meyer, and French (1965) investigated performance appraisal discussions in order to determine the effects these interviews have on work performance. In addition, the relationship between the superior and subordinate was analyzed. The theoretical perspective utilized for this study suggested that the reaction to a threatening

communication event is dependent upon the self-concept of the individual. Results indicated that an increase in threats during the appraisal interview proportionally increased the level of communication defensiveness. However, if the threats were not perceived throughout the interview, the subordinate was less defensive. Self-esteem did not appear to affect an employee's level of defensiveness. In relation to goal achievement, employees that received fewer threats reported high performance rates. Also, subjects experiencing an interview consisting of several personal assaults expressed less favorable attitudes toward the appraisal system. Another implication derived from these results suggest that constructive criticism might induce less defensiveness indicating that negative predispositions toward the appraisal process might be avoided (Kay, Meyer, & French, 1965).

Previous studies have investigated employee perceptions of communication behaviors within organizations. For example, Maier and Danielson (1956) conducted a role play of a union grievance procedure and found that when a supervisor was perceived to asssume a judicial role, or that of a judge, superior-subordinate relations decreased. Solem (1960) found that supervisors utilizing a "problem solving" style of appraisal interviews were more successful and subordinates were more satisfied with the appraisal. French, Kay, and Meyer (1966) concluded that increases in

participation during performance appraisal interviews improved superior-subordinate relations.

Falcione, McCroskey, and Daly (1977) investigated job satisfaction in relation to communication apprehension, self-esteem, and perceptions of employees' immediate supervisors. For the purposes of this study, the five dimensional Job Descriptive Index (JDI) by Smith, Kendall, and Hulin (1969) was utilized to measure job satisfaction. Falcione et al. assume that "an employee would be more satisfied if a positive communication relationship with the supervisor was perceived" (p. 366). Therefore, three variables were included in this study: perceived listening, understandingness, and communication quality. Perceived listening is operationally defined by a subject identifying to what extent the other individual is alert, listening, attentive, and shows interest during an interaction. Understandingness is defined as the perception of another person being sensitive, responsive, warm, empathic, and understanding. Quality of communication identifies whether an interaction was perceived to be of high or low quality, poor or excellent, correct or incorrect, worthless or worthwhile, as well as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Results derived from surveys administered to 211 federal government employees and 189 teachers indicate that the supervisor satisfaction dimension of job satisfaction was most closely related to the perceived communication

behaviors (perceived listening, understandingness, and communication quality). Thus, these authors conclude that a supervisor's perceived communication behaviors can enhance or reduce a subordinates' level of satisfaction with their supervisor.

Pincus (1986) explored the relationship between communication satisfaction and job satisfaction. The sample used for this study was 327 nurses employed at a large teaching hospital. Pincus employed the Downs and Hazen (1977) communication satisfaction measure and a modified version of the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) developed by Smith, Kendall, and Hulin (1969). Results of this study found a moderate correlation ($r=.39$, $p<.001$) between communication satisfaction and job satisfaction. Pincus concluded that these results confirm the importance of employees' perceptions of organizational communication to job satisfaction.

Although several studies have investigated employee satisfaction with the appraisal interview, a paucity of research exists which investigates an employees' satisfaction with communication which occurs during the performance appraisal. However, Hecht (1976, 1978a, 1978b) conceptually defined and developed a measure of interpersonal communication satisfaction. This measure was developed because it "enables the communication researcher to apply communication theory and research to the pursuit of

making everyday interaction more fulfilling" (Hecht, 1978a, p. 47). Hecht (1978b) proposed that communication satisfaction within the systems perspective can be utilized as a criterion variable to assess outcomes of inputs and process variables of communication behaviors. Hecht (1978b) also recognizes that "satisfaction is conceptualized as an internal reinforcer" (p. 255).

Upon completing an extensive set of studies designed to generate items and factor analyze those same items, a uni-dimensional, 19-item instrument was derived. Hecht (1978b) suggests that this measure is applicable in regard to either an actual or recalled situation and can be used in reference to a communication event with either a friend, acquaintance, or stranger. Thus, the interpersonal communication satisfaction measure is best utilized to assess specific communication situations within a variety of contexts.

Several studies have used Hechts' (1978b) measure of communication satisfaction (e.g., Duran & Zakahi, 1987; Hecht, Sereno, & Spitzberg, 1984; and LaMude, Daniels, & Graham, 1988). Respective communication contexts for these studies include: the classroom pertaining to communication and instruction, interpersonal relations, and superior-subordinate relations. Although LaMude, Daniels, and Graham (1988) explored communication satisfaction between superiors and subordinates in an organizational

context, communication satisfaction has not yet been investigated in relation to performance appraisal interviews. Given the importance of these communication events within an organization, as suggested by Ilgen, Fisher, and Taylor (1979) and O'Reilly and Anderson (1980), such an investigation is warranted.

Rationale and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate communication which occurs during the performance appraisal interview. Such an investigation is warranted by Ilgen, Fisher, and Taylor (1979) who recognize that performance feedback is an important communication event within the organizational environment. Further, O'Reilly and Anderson (1980, p. 290) state that "the feedback of performance appraisal information is a critical communication activity in organizations." However, O'Reilly and Anderson recognize that one empirical limitation in the literature is a lack of studies conducted in actual organizations that investigate the performance appraisal interview. Therefore, this research project investigates employee perceptions of communication during performance appraisals.

Further support for this study is provided by French, Meyer, and Kay (1966) who found communication and participation in performance appraisal interviews to improve superior-subordinate relations. Solem (1960) found that supervisors utilizing a problem solving style of appraisal

interview were more successful supervisors and subordinates were more satisfied with the appraisal. Further, satisfaction with supervision was investigated in relation to how employees perceive the communication behaviors of their supervisors (Falcione, McCroskey, & Daly, 1977) and Pincus (1986) found a moderate correlation between communication satisfaction and job satisfaction. However, the relationship between satisfaction with communication and perceptions of management communication style during the performance appraisal have not yet been investigated.

Therefore, the purpose of this investigation is to determine the relationship between management communication style and communication satisfaction during performance appraisal interviews. The relationship between MCS and employee satisfaction (Richmond & McCroskey, 1979; Richmond, McCroskey, & Davis, 1982; and Richmond, McCroskey, Davis, & Koontz, 1980) and communication satisfaction and job satisfaction (Pincus, 1986) has been established. Further, the style of communication perceived during an appraisal interview has been correlated with satisfaction with supervision and the interview itself (Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Burke, Weitzel, & Weir, 1978; Dipboye & de Pontbriand, 1981; Greller, 1978; Meyer & Walker, 1961; Nemeroff & Cosentino, 1979; and Wexley, Singh, & Yukl, 1973). However, management communication style, as defined by Richmond and McCroskey (1979), has not been investigated in relation to superior

and subordinate levels of communication satisfaction regarding a recent performance appraisal interview. Therefore, the following research questions were advanced:

RQ1: What is the relationship between the superiors' perceptions of management communication style and satisfaction with communication during the interview?

RQ2: What is the relationship between the subordinates' perceptions of management communication style and satisfaction with communication during the interview?

Methods

Subjects and Procedures.

One hundred and sixty-six questionnaires were distributed through the campus mail system at a large midwestern university. A 50% return resulted in a participation of 83 staff employees (47 supervisors; and 36 subordinates). Attached to each questionnaire was a letter explaining that the purpose of the survey was to assess communication during performance appraisal interviews. Participants were asked to respond to two instruments based on the way they perceived communication during a recent performance appraisal interview. Subordinate subjects responded to this questionnaire in reference to their most recent performance appraisal interaction with a supervisor while supervisors responded to this instrument in reference

to an appraisal interview with one of their employees. The instruments attached to the letter included the MCS and communication satisfaction measures.

Measurement.

Management Communication Style. The management communication style instrument (MCS) (Richmond and McCroskey, 1979) consists of a 19-point continuum representing four styles of management communication. Subjects identified the point on the continuum that most closely represented the style of communication perceived to have been utilized during a recent performance appraisal interview. Test-retest reliability was .88. This estimate is consistent with Richmond and McCroskey, .85.

Communication Satisfaction. The instrument utilized to measure communication satisfaction was developed and tested by Hecht (1976, 1978a, 1978b). This measure was designed to investigate a persons' reaction to a particular conversation. Thus, this instrument is referred to as a situational measure of interpersonal communication satisfaction. The communication satisfaction measure consists of 19 items and utilizes a 7-point, bi-polar, agree-disagree response format. A Cronbach alpha reliability of .95 was achieved for this measure.

Results

The communication satisfaction measure is proposed by Hecht (1978b) to be a uni-dimensional instrument. To verify

this statement, a principal components factor analysis procedure was performed on the 19-item communication satisfaction measure. The initial factor analysis procedure yielded a 2 factor solution. This two-factor orthogonal solution indicates that six items load on the first factor while only two items load on the second factor, using a .60/.40 purity index (see Table 1). Thus, due to the weak two-factor solution, a one-factor solution was analyzed. Results from the one-factor solution indicate that 18 of the 19 items have a factor loading of .60 or greater. The remaining item (number 6) will therefore be omitted from further analyses. The single-factor structure and communalities are included in Table 2.

The results of this factor analysis procedure closely replicate those reported by Hecht (1978b) who found that all 19 items loaded on the first unrotated factor. For the purposes of this study 18 of 19 unrotated items loaded on the first factor. These results support the contention by Hecht who suggested that the communication satisfaction measure is unidimensional. Therefore, for the purposes of this investigation a composite measure of the communication satisfaction instrument will be utilized with the remaining 18 items being combined as an index of communication satisfaction.

Two research questions investigate the relationship between management communication style and communication

satisfaction. Separate correlations were examined, one pertaining to supervisors and the second regarding subordinates: (1) "What is the relationship between the superiors' perceptions of management communication style and satisfaction with communication during the interview?" and (2) "What is the relationship between the subordinates' perceptions of management communication style and communication satisfaction during the interview?" Supervisor means and standard deviations for both the MCS and communication satisfaction measures were: (1) MCS: M=22.03, SD=3.55 and (2) communication satisfaction: M=111.34, SD=12.68. The correlation between superiors' perceptions of communication style and communication satisfaction (RQ 1) is not significant ($r = .22$, $p > .13$). These results indicate that the perception of the style of communication utilized by a superior is not significantly related to a superiors' level of communication satisfaction.

Research question 2 explores the relationship between subordinates' perceptions of communication style and communication satisfaction. Subordinate means and standard deviations for both the MCS and communication satisfaction measures were: (1) MCS: M=22.56, SD=5.01 and (2) communcation satisfaction: M=107.34, SD=25.31. The correlation between these two variables is significant ($r = .63$, $p < .0001$) which accounted for 40% of the variance. Thus, management communication style appears to be significantly

related to a subordinates' level of self-reported communication satisfaction. The following section will further evaluate these results as well as the apparent perceptual differences between superiors and subordinates.

Discussion

The first research question investigates the relationship between superiors' perceptions of management communication style and communication satisfaction. This research question was analyzed utilizing a Pearson-r correlation procedure. The results for research question 1 produced a non-significant relationship between superiors' perceptions of management communication style and communication satisfaction. These results suggest that, from the superiors' perspective, the style of communication perceived to have taken place during an appraisal interview is not correlated with the self-reported satisfaction with communication during the performance appraisal interview. One possible explanation is the fact that a supervisor often controls the interaction taking place during an apprasial interview, and therefore, is more likely to be satisfied with the communication that occurred regardless of the style of communication utilized during the interview.

Another possible explanation might be that the style of communication utilized is not a salient issue for superiors engaged in appraisal interviews in this organization. In other words, as long as an interaction with a subordinate is

not adversarial and does not initiate a defensive reaction on the part of the subordinate, a supervisor is more likely to be satisfied. However, it should be noted that 77% of the subjects participating in this investigation perceive that a very open and honest interaction took place. This supports previous research which concludes that subordinates react positively to participative interactions (Bassett & Meyer, 1968; Burke & Wilcox, 1969; French, Meyer, & Kay, 1966; and Solem, 1960). Apparently, superiors do not experience many interactions which are negative or adversarial in nature. This non-significant relationship might also be attributed to the fact that negative communication does not occur between superiors and subordinates during performance appraisal interviews. In other words, neither the supervisor or the subordinate initiates or engages in an argument or disagreement during the appraisal interview which offends or insults the other person.

The second research question investigates the relationship between the subordinates' perception of the style of communication utilized during the appraisal interview and communication satisfaction. The correlation between these two variables was significant, accounting for 40% of the variance in communication satisfaction scores. These results suggest that management communication style is significantly related to a subordinates' satisfaction with

communication. Possible explanations for these results are provided by Bassett and Meyer (1968), Burke and Wilcox (1969), French, Meyer, and Kay (1966) and Solem (1960) who found that employees asked to participate in the performance appraisal interview were consistently more satisfied with the appraisal process and system. Considering that 75% of the subordinates participating in this investigation reported that the communication style utilized during their interview was "employee-centered", using a "consulting" or "joining" MCS, a positive relationship between communication style and communication satisfaction was expected. Specifically, the style of communication utilized during the appraisal interview appears to be related to a subordinate's level of satisfaction with communication. Conversely, the utilization of either a "telling" or "selling" communication style could reduce an employee's level of communication satisfaction.

In comparison, the results of this investigation indicate that subordinates are more affected than superiors by the style of communication that is utilized in important dyadic encounters, such as performance appraisal interviews. In fact, considering the non-significant relationship between supervisors' communication style and communication satisfaction, other factors may be related to satisfaction with communication for supervisors. For example, compliance may be a contributing factor depending upon the preferred

communication style of the supervisor; supervisors using a "selling" MCS might attempt to persuade employees to agree with the opinions or evaluation derived from the appraisal interview. On the other hand, utilization of a participative MCS strategy (as opposed to a compliance-gaining strategy) may be more characteristic of a "consulting" or "joining" style of supervision. Although some research has evaluated the relationship between variables such as authoritarianism and satisfaction (Wexley, Singh, & Yukl, 1973), future research should attempt to further evaluate the relationship between management communication style and communication satisfaction in relation to factors that may affect the style of communication utilized during a performance appraisal interview.

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Table 1

Factor Analysis of Communication Satisfaction Measure: Orthogonal Two-Factor Solution

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Communality Estimates
1.	0.75667*	0.23919	.63
2.	0.51595	0.44984	.47
3.	0.58044	0.30917	.43
4.	0.64184	0.43708	.60
5.	0.65773	0.52143	.70
6.	-0.08432	0.74282*	.56
7.	0.70816*	0.13940	.52
8.	0.86513*	0.14991	.77
9.	0.79428*	0.28028	.71
10.	0.83958*	0.21169	.75
11.	0.56524	0.59693	.67
12.	0.65787*	0.22761	.48
13.	0.58113	0.56247	.65
14.	0.63731	0.48833	.64
15.	0.63242	0.47743	.63
16.	0.76429	0.45422	.79
17.	0.57479	0.42145	.51
18.	0.38864	0.55318	.46
19.	0.39644	0.71438*	.67
Eigenvalues	10.53	1.13	
% of total variance	55.4%	5.9%	
Total Variance Accounted For		61.3%	

* Indicates Items Identified in Each Factor Using the .60/.40 Purity Index

Table 2

Factor Analysis of Communication Satisfaction Measure: Orthogonal One-Factor Solution

Item	Factor 1	Communality Estimates
1.	0.76467	.58
2.	0.67781	.46
3.	0.65513	.43
4.	0.77636	.60
5.	0.83568	.70
6.	0.33449*	.11
7.	0.66958	.45
8.	0.80687	.65
9.	0.81860	.67
10.	0.81916	.67
11.	0.79905	.64
12.	0.67554	.46
13.	0.79387	.63
14.	0.80052	.64
15.	0.79047	.62
16.	0.88834	.79
17.	0.71163	.51
18.	0.62747	.39
19.	0.72193	.52
Eigenvalue	10.53	
% of total variance	55.4%	

(*)=Item omitted from composite measure.